Maybe it’s our climate; maybe it’s the scenery; or maybe it’s that Virginia really is for lovers. Whatever the reason, about 86% of VRS retirees remain in the commonwealth. In fact, according to a report by WalletHub from earlier this year, Virginia ranks as one of the best states in the nation for retirees to live.

Taking into consideration affordability, health-related factors and quality of life, the study placed Virginia in the number four spot overall out of all 50 states—behind only Florida, Colorado and Delaware. When comparing individual categories, Virginia ranked higher than Colorado in affordability, higher than Delaware in quality of life and higher than Florida in health care.

We asked our Facebook followers who live in Virginia to tell us what was behind their decision to remain in-state for retirement. Here’s what some VRS retirees had to say.

Sue M.O.
I’m proud to be a Virginia state retiree living in southwest Virginia. Enjoying the beautiful mountains and always look forward to the four seasons. Living close to my children and grandchildren is a plus!

Brian U.
Built my own farm and can’t imagine living anywhere else.

Jan K.A.
Virginia was pretty central to our families in Pennsylvania and South Carolina. We compared other states for health care and taxes and concluded that staying here was right for us.

Deborah B.
This state will always be home. I am between the Blue Ridge and the ocean. My family has lived here for generations and I’m proud to be called a Virginian.

Bill J.
I never want to live anywhere else. I am an outdoorsman and love the outdoor opportunities offered here. Plus my family is all around me in our wonderful mountains.

Stephen R.
I live in Virginia because I don’t like alligators. I refuse to live anywhere I’m not top of the food chain.

Popular media depictions of retirement might show someone leaving the workplace and immediately moving to a tropical climate to spend all day at the beach or on the golf course, but there is no “one-retirement-fits-all.” You might not need to go very far to get what you want out of your retirement experience. Plus, Virginia has its fair share of both beaches and golf courses.

Discern the Outdoors
Virginia’s natural beauty was a topic that came up frequently in our Facebook responses. With four distinct seasons and mountains and beaches only a few hours away from each other,
When it comes to money management and improving your overall financial health, it’s never too late to sharpen your skills and gain new knowledge. Expanded financial wellness content is now available for VRS retirees registered in myVRS. Simply log in at myVRS.varetire.org and select Financial Wellness. Discover interactive courses, personalized action plans and content recommendations based on your interests. Here is a small sampling of what’s available:

**Beneficiary management.** Update your beneficiaries online instead of submitting a paper form. This includes updating beneficiaries for your VRS defined benefit member account and group life insurance benefits to ensure payments are made according to your wishes. Retirees participating in a defined contribution plan (DCP) will continue to update DCP beneficiaries through Account Access at varetire.org/dcp-login.

**Accessing survivor benefits.** Retirees who are receiving survivor benefits based on another VRS member’s account will automatically be able to view their survivor benefits using their personal myVRS account.

**Direct deposit management.** Set up direct deposit or notify VRS when you change financial institutions or bank accounts and need to redirect your monthly benefit payment.

**Health insurance credit management.** Claim your health insurance credit online. You can also easily report future changes in insurance premiums. For more information on the health insurance credit, see “Use myVRS to Apply for the Health Insurance Credit and Update Health Insurance Information” on page 5.

---

**Sharpen Your Money Skills in Retirement With myVRS Financial Wellness**

When it comes to money management and improving your overall financial health, it’s never too late to sharpen your skills and gain new knowledge. Expanded financial wellness content is now available for VRS retirees registered in myVRS. Simply log in at myVRS.varetire.org and select Financial Wellness. Discover interactive courses, personalized action plans and content recommendations based on your interests. Here is a small sampling of what’s available:

**Credit Card Pay Down Tool**

Are you ready to leave credit card debt behind in retirement? There are several strategies to pay down your cards; the Credit Card Pay Down tool helps you choose the right one. Using your personalized inputs, the tool estimates how quickly your debt can disappear based on a balance transfer, fixed amount payments or minimum payments.

**Evaluate Your Risk of Identity Theft**

Find out how your current habits impact your risk of identity theft and learn what you can do to lower your risk level. The ID Theft Risk assessment offers guidance on how to manage your personal information both online and in the real world and gives tips for changing some of your riskier behaviors.

**What’s Your Money Personality?**

Personality assessments can be a fun way to gain insight into our own psyche. Your Money Personality helps you explore the brain-wallet link and understand the “why” behind your money decisions. It only takes about 15 minutes to take this in-depth assessment. See how your results compare to others, learn the strengths and weaknesses of each personality type and get recommendations on how to make your money personality work for you.
Robinson, who retired from Richmond Public Schools in 2019 after a career as an attendance officer, now continues his passion for music in retirement. Last year Robinson wrote and produced a track that is now streaming on Spotify and other services, titled “Don’t Bring No Suitcase.” With more songs on their way to the internet, Robinson says he wants to share his love of music with the world.

**How long have you been writing and producing songs?**

I’ve been writing songs my whole life, since I was a teenager. In 1999 I did an album with a group out of Petersburg, A Touch of Charm. There were two songs that were covers—one from The Temptations and the other Blue Magic—but I wrote the rest of the songs on that CD. It did very well and sold more than 4,000 copies in Japan, as well as numerous copies sold in the USA. Later on, I started doing educational music, and I released a CD called “Countdown 2 Freedom.” One song on there is called “Freedom Ride,” about the Freedom Riders in the South in the 1960s, and a song called “Read Children Read,” teaching kids about the importance of reading.

I grew up with Santana and wanted to do something with that kind of feel. The song has a modern sound, but with that Latin rock fusion. With multitracking, we only had two guys recording the whole song. And all the music was done with computers. Twenty years ago, I would’ve had to hire a bass player, guitar player, keyboard player and drummer, but all of that was done on the computer for this song.

**What inspires you to write music?**

People inspire me. Just talking to people will sometimes give me a good idea for a song. I’m always writing lyrics; I’ve probably written lyrics to 300 to 400 songs in my life. For my educational music, my entire career I interacted with children—originally working in juvenile corrections and then in Petersburg and Richmond schools—so that’s all I know.

**Where can people hear your music?**

I have songs on Spotify, iTunes, Amazon and SoundCloud. I have a song about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that I plan to put up on Spotify. There was a contest online about writing social justice songs, and I entered my Dr. King song. I heard back and my song is going to be played on WNIR (World National Indie Radio).
The Virginia Retirement System achieved a 27.5% return, net of fees, on its investment portfolio for fiscal year 2021. The VRS trust fund ended the year with approximately $101.8 billion, exceeding the $100 billion mark for the first time in its history.

“We have registered one of the strongest return years in recent memory, far surpassing the 6.75% annual assumed rate of return for the fund, but more important, exceeding the assumed rate of return for the three- five- and 10-year periods,” Chief Investment Officer Ronald D. Schmitz said. “We were in position to take advantage of conditions in the public equity, private equity and private credit arenas, as well as our other asset classes. We also kept focus on our long-term investment strategy, pursuing broad opportunities and optimal returns while balancing risk to deliver high value to the fund.”

“We are buoyed by this year’s historic return and high-water mark for the portfolio, which contribute to the long-term health of a fund held in trust for the Commonwealth’s public servants,” noted VRS Board Chair O’Kelly E. McWilliams III. “Likewise, I applaud the commitment of our professional investments team, who have contributed to the robust growth of the fund, helping ensure a stable contribution rate for our participating employers, including the Commonwealth as well as counties, cities and towns and other political subdivisions across the state.”

The portfolio included approximately $37.2 billion in public equity, $13.6 billion in fixed income, $14.2 billion in credit strategies, $12.1 billion in real assets, $15.9 billion in private equity, $2.0 billion in private investment partnerships and $3.1 billion in the public strategies portfolio, as of June 30, 2021.
If you retired with at least 15 years of service from a participating employer, the health insurance credit is a tax-free reimbursement (as directed by the IRS) to assist with the cost of your health insurance premiums. The credit is a dollar amount set by the General Assembly for each year of service and is added to your monthly retirement benefit. The credit ends upon your death and cannot exceed the amount of your individual health insurance premium.

**Applying for the Health Insurance Credit**

If VRS is already deducting your health insurance premium from your retirement benefit, you do not need to apply for the health insurance credit. This deduction appears on your Benefit Payment Summary page in myVRS.

If VRS is not deducting your health insurance premium or if you have eligible health insurance coverage in addition to coverage that VRS is already deducting, log in to myVRS at myVRS.varetire.org to claim your credit and ensure you receive the maximum amount.

Keeping your information current ensures you receive the proper credit amount and are not at risk for receiving an overpayment, which would require you to reimburse VRS.

Qualifying health plans:
- Individual health plans.
- Coverage as a dependent on a spouse’s plan.
- Employer-sponsored health plans, including the State Retiree Health Benefits Program.
- Medicare Part B.
- Dental and vision plans.
- Prescription drug plans, including Medicare Part D.

**Report Health Insurance Coverage Changes**

Report the following coverage changes to VRS by logging in to myVRS:
- Change in your health insurance plan.
- Increase or decrease in your health insurance premium.
- Cancellation of your health insurance.

Alternatively, you may complete and send the Request for Health Insurance Credit (VRS-45) to VRS. The VRS-45 is available at varetire.org/forms or by calling 888-827-3847.

If your health insurance premiums are deducted from your retirement benefit, you do not need to notify VRS of a premium increase unless you are not already claiming your maximum credit amount.
there’s always a variety of experiences available. Visiting Virginia’s top-notch state park system is one of the best ways to take it all in. If you are age 62 or older, you qualify for a Senior Naturally Yours Passport, which offers a year of admission and parking for less than half the price of a standard annual pass. Start 2022 off right by taking part in Virginia State Parks First Day Hike Challenge. Go for a hike in a state park on January 1 and register for a chance to win up to a $500 gift certificate. Visit dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks for more information.

Experience Food, Vineyards and Culture

Retirement can be a chance to enjoy the finer things in life, some of which may be located in your own backyard. Virginia’s culinary scene showcases the best of traditional Southern cooking and cuisines from all around the globe. Likewise, Virginia wineries have been garnering more and more international attention in recent years, and microbreweries and distilleries are often destination points for an outing with friends. Combined with an extensive offering of museums, theaters, music venues and festivals, this means a day trip or night on the town is never more than a stone’s throw away. Visit virginia.org for dining guides, wine tours and endless ideas for exploring Virginia.

Retirees Help Fuel Our Economy

In fiscal year 2021, VRS paid out $5.5 billion to retirees and beneficiaries. With the majority living in Virginia, that means VRS retirees and beneficiaries purchase goods and services in their communities, helping to boost the state and local economics.

Retired Public Safety Officers May Be Eligible for HELPS Act

The federal Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Safety (HELPS) Retirees Act allows eligible retired public safety officers to exclude a certain amount per year from retirement income used for qualified health insurance premiums or long-term care insurance premiums, if the premiums are deducted directly from their retirement benefit.

Premiums covering yourself, your spouse and dependent children may be eligible for this tax exclusion. You must claim the insurance premium exclusion on your tax return. The Form 1099-R that you receive reflects total taxable income without any adjustment for this benefit. For more information, contact a tax advisor or the IRS at 800-829-1040, or visit irs.gov.
The saying goes, “once you’re a teacher, you’re always a teacher,” and this certainly holds true for Diane Painter, Ph.D. After 30 years of service as an educator, 25 of those years with Fairfax County Public Schools, Painter is active in retirement as a part-time instructor at Shenandoah University in Winchester and an educational liaison for Makersmiths Inc., a northern Virginia non-profit makerspace organization with locations in Leesburg and Purcellville.

Diane Painter promotes the KidWind Challenge.

“Most pictures on the national KidWind site were of projects made from cardboard and tin foil,” Painter says. “We decided to do something better and use laser cutters and 3D printers for kids to design and build their projects.”

Last year Painter’s group of kids produced two wind turbine projects and three solar panel projects with the solar panel projects winning the top three places at KidWind’s state level competition. Painter was named 2020 KidWind Coach of the Year for Virginia.

Painter believes getting involved with a makerspace is a great opportunity for retirees who have skills they want to share with others or for those who want to learn a new skill.

“People of all ages are members, and of the people who are retirees, they seem to really enjoy it,” Painter says about her experiences at Makersmiths. With classes for woodworking, metalworking, ceramics and more, she says anyone looking to pick up a new hobby can join and get started.

Makerspaces typically have a membership fee and require training before using many tools. Some, like Makersmiths, also ask members for a few hours of volunteer time each month.

“It’s not just having access to space but also giving volunteer time, giving back, helping others,” Painter says.

According to Painter, there are multiple makerspace organizations located throughout Virginia. Many public libraries are also adding their own makerspaces, giving communities access to resources not traditionally associated with a typical library. If you’d like to join in on the growing maker movement, be on the lookout for a makerspace in your neck of the woods.

Do You Have a Story to Share?

Contact VRS at proffice@varetire.org with your unique retirement experiences or advice about life in retirement.
Virginia Retirement System
P.O. Box 2500
Richmond, Virginia 23218-2500

---

Stay Connected With VRS
Claim Your Online Account

Visit myVRS.varetire.org to register your account or log in.

- Add or update your email address.
- Verify your mailing address and phone number.
- Explore online services for retirees.

myVRS helps you stay informed of your benefits.

Help VRS stay in touch with you.

---

VRS BY THE NUMBERS

VRS Fiduciary Net Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fund Position (billions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>$58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>$82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>$82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>$102.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Fiduciary Net Position reflects the balance of resources available to pay benefits at the end of the fiscal year. Approximately two-thirds of benefit payments come from investment earnings. The VRS trust fund ended the year with approximately $102.5 billion, exceeding the $100 billion mark for the first time in its history.